DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 220 505 TM 820 520

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TITLE Measuring the Impact of ESEA Title I Evaluation Technical Assistance Centers--One View.
PUB DATE Mar 82
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (66th, New York, NY, March 19-23, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Records; Decision Making; *Information Needs; *Measurement Techniques; *Program Evaluation; *Technical Assistance
IDENTIFIERS Client Behavior; Elementary Secondary Education Act Title I; *Technical Assistance Centers; *Title I Evaluation and Reporting System

ABSTRACT

The ESEA Title I evaluation Technical Assistance Centers (TACs) assist state and local education agencies to implement the Title I Evaluation and Reporting System (TIERS), to improve the quality of evaluation information, and to use evaluation results for local decision making. This paper reports on the results of one method of assessing the impact of TACs in these three areas by comparing contact logs for 1977-78 and 1980-81 for types of topics covered, the level of difficulty of the material covered, and the mode of service delivery. Preliminary results show that there have been major changes in three areas: increasing variety of evaluation topics in which clients are interested, increasing emphasis on topics dealing with local use of evaluation results, and an increasing number of topics covered at a "refinement" level of sophistication. These changes seem to be the result of several forces interacting with each other--evolution in the TACs, evolution of the Federal policy, and evolution in the state and local education agencies. Measures of TAC impact have implications for design of future technical assistance efforts. (Author/BW)

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Measuring the Impact of ESEA Title I Evaluation Technical Assistance Centers--One View

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The ESEA Title I Evaluation Technical Assistance Centers (TACs) have been in existence since 1976 in order to assist SEAs and LEAs to (1) implement the Title I Evaluation and Reporting System (TIERS), (2) improve the technical quality of the information they collect and (3) plan evaluation activities that will be useful for local decision making. The purpose of this paper is to explore one possible method for determining what impact the TACs have had in these three areas.

Examining TAC impact is important at this time because the current TAC contracts end in September 1982. Information concerning TAC effectiveness is needed in order to determine what form, if any, TACs will assume after that time. Examination of TAC impact is also interesting from a theoretical perspective. The purpose of TAC services is to change evaluation practices at the SEA and LEA levels. Knowledge concerning the effect of various "helping" strategies on local practice can contribute to the design of future assistance activities and can indicate to what extent local practice can be changed.

There are several different approaches that one could take in order to assess TAC impact on evaluation practice. One would be to examine case studies of particular SEAs and LEAs to determine changes due to TAC assistance. Another approach would be to survey SEAs and LEAs and have them self-report on the impact that TACs have had on their own

TM 820 520

Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting, New York 1982

practices. Still another way would be to use the perceptions of TAC staff to list unusual side effects and spin-offs of TAC services. (For example, in some LEAs that we visit, the only district summary of test scores is kept in the Title I office for student selection and evaluation of program impact.)

For this study I attempt to use hard data to assess TAC impact. Specifically, I utilize the information contained on contact logs with clients, available since the beginning of the contract, to make comparisons between past and present activities--the change in topics requested by clients, the change in the level of the discussion and the change in service delivery mode. I assumed that changes in the type of requests would reflect the impact of our services. In addition to noting changes in service delivery, I wanted to estimate the feasibility of the method in terms of reliability in order to make recommendations for future recording of contacts.

Methodology

Data Source. TAC staff record information concerning each client contact. This information has always included, besides client identifying information, the mode of the contact (telephone, on-site consultation or workshop), a short description of the activity and a long description of the details of the technical assistance provided. For this study we are using contact logs and correspondence from contract years 1977-78 and 1980-81. (Records from the first contract year, 19'6-77 are not used because there were relatively few contacts and because contact logs are in relative disarray.) The contact logs used are those from the Region 9 TAC states of Arizona, California, Hawaii and

Nevada. Although areas in the South Pacific are in Region 9, they are not included in this study because by 1980-81 most had consolidated their funding under another Title and so were no longer eligible for our services.

Codes. In order to compare the change in topics covered in our contacts, I used a topic classification system devised by USED and implemented in all TACs during the 1979-80 contract year. The classification scheme consists of four general areas--technical assistance (providing information), obtaining information, planning and other. The majority of contacts fall in the area of providing information—there are 23 categories of topics on which we provide technical assistance. (The entire topic coding system is included as Appendix A.)

In order to compare the level of discussion (in terms of sophistication) and the type of activity (in terms of our three goals) involved in our contacts, I used a classification system devised by Estes and Fetler (1980). There are three levels of sophistication. An "awareness" level means that the purpose of the contact was to make the client aware of responsibilities, services, procedures and/or concerns. For example, presentations or discussions that are overviews of a topic would be at an awareness level. A "skill development" level means that clients actually use the knowledge presented to perform some task. For example, participants might practice using the criteria for selecting tests by using our test selection simulation. Or a consultation might involve applying knowledge to address a local concern. A "refinement" level means that a contact has gone beyond the basics to broader understanding and application. For example, technical investigations or

technical discussions at a high level of issues surrounding the TIERS would be at a refinement level. Level was coded as "not applicable" in those contacts which did not involve technical assistance, such as planning and obtaining information. (The level coding system is presented in Appendix B.)

Type of activity also had three levels. A contact was coded as "compliance" if discussion or training centered on things which had to be done specifically to get in the required reports or to implement the TIERS as required or suggested. A contact was coded as "quality control" if the main concern was quality control or if it involved ways of improving the quality of the data collected. A contact was coded as "local use" if it involved topics that went beyond those required or suggested for the TIERS. Examples are process evaluation, additional data analyses and technical investigations. Type of activity was coded as "not applicable" if it involved obtaining information, planning or other. The "type of activity" codes were developed to reflect the three major TAC goals described in the first paragraph of this paper. (A more complete description of the activity codes is presented in Appendix B.)

Even though it may seem that the USED topic codes could be nested within the activity codes, this is not necessarily the case. For example, test selection could be "compliance" if the purpose was to select a test that has the properties needed for TIERS reporting, "quality control" if the purpose was to select a test to give them better quality data, or "local use" if the purpose was to select a test to give them more useful data.

Procedure. All contact logs from contract year 1980-81 were coded according to USED topics by the TAC staff involved in the contact.

Contact logs from 1977-78 were not so coded. The author coded all 1977-78 contact logs and mail according to topics. In both 1977-78 and 1980-81 a contact may involve more than one topic. The author also coded each topic on both old and new contact logs according to level and type of activity.

There could be two major sources of inaccuracies in this coding procedure. First there is concern about the reliability of assigning codes. Second, although I attempted to be objective, it is still true that I wish to see a change in services over time which may have biased my coding. It was not possible to have a naive coder score the contacts because sometimes the coding depended on a memory of the purpose that the client had in mind when the contact occurred. In order to attempt to control these sources of bias, the following procedure was adopted.

For the 1980-81 logs, two weeks after I coded them I did a reliability check. I recoded all contacts in October through December, 1980 on level and type of activity. There were 139 topics listed through workshops, consultations and telephone contacts. Of these, I had an 88% hit rate on type of activity and an 81% hit rate on level for each of the topics. After two months the hit rate was down to 69% and 61%, respectively. Since 75% or more of the disagreements showed that the first rating was lower in terms of sophistication, I used first codes. This would provide a conservative estimate of change.

For the 1977-78 logs, about two months after the initial coding, I recoded a sample of the logs. Since these had to be coded according to topics as well as activities and levels, I had to determine first what the hit rate was on identifying topics, and then within those common to the two sets of ratings what the hit rate was on activity and level of each topic. Counting only technical assistance topics, there were 129

topics counted during the first coding and 118 during the second. Of these, 88 were identical (68% of the first coding and 75% of the second coding). Of the 88 common topics between codings, there was a 67% hit rate on the type of activity and a 75% hit rate on the level of the activity. These accuracy rates were about the same as those obtained from an inter-rater reliability check based on another sample of old logs.

I decided that this accuracy rate was not high enough. Therefore, all 1977-78 logs were recoded. Whenever there was a discrepancy between type of activity or level, the code signifying the greater degree of sophistication was used. Thus, level of sophistication on the old logs is, if anything, an overestimate of what occurred.

Data Analyses. Nonparametric statistics were used to compare the years on each of the following:

1. The proportion of client contacts handled through each of the four service delivery modes--workshops, consultations, telephone and mail.

2. The change in topics discussed. Since there are 29 topic codes on the USED sheets, they were grouped into the four major categories--providing information, obtaining information, planning and other. Separate analyses were done for the primary topic of the contact, and for primary and secondary topics together. In order to determine how the technical topics themselves (providing information) changed over time, the popularity of the 23 technical topics was ranked two ways--first by the number of contacts in which they were the primary topic of discussion, and second by the number of clients who received information on each of the primary topics.

3. The change in type and level of topics. Since these codes were not applicable to the topic categories of planning, obtaining information and other, only technical topics (providing information) were considered. Separate analyses were done for the primary topic of each contact and for the primary and secondary topics together.

Results

Table 1 shows that the total number of contacts has increased from 396 in 1977-78 to 1,122 in 1980-81 (an increase of 283%). Considering only contacts whose primary purpose was technical assistance, the number of contacts has increased from 197 to 631 (320%). The total number of clients served has increased 231% (from 1,607 to 3,709). Considering only contacts whose primary purpose was technical assistance, the number of clients has increased 232% (from 1,370 to 3,182). This increase seems to be due to acceptance by clients of TAC and awareness by TAC of client needs.

Also seen in Table 1 is that the relative proportion of telephone and mail contacts has remained constant over time. The major difference in service delivery mode is that proportionately more workshops were done in 1977-78 and more consultations were done in 1980-81. Since consultations typically have fewer clients than workshops, this could explain why the number of contacts has increased faster than the number of clients.

Table 2 shows differences between the years in the types of activities (compliance, quality control, or local use) dealt with in the technical assistance contacts. Since each contact may have covered more than one topic, each topic was counted separately. (This is why the number of technical assistance topics in Table 2 is greater than the number of technical assistance contacts in Table 1.) Considering all

Table 1

Comparison of Years on Mode of Client Contact
Technical Assistance and Total Contacts

Mode	Technical Assistance Contacts		Total Contacts	
	1977-78	1980-81	1977-78	1980-81
Workshop	41 (20.8%)	73 (11.6%)	41 (10.4%)	73 (6.5%)
On-Site	21 (10.7%)	126 (20.0%)	28 (7.1%)	139 (12.4%)
Telephone	69 (35.0%)	209 (33.1%)	200 (50.4%)	572 (51.0%)
Mail	66 (33.5%)	223 (35.3%)	127 (32.1%)	338 (30.1%)
Total	197 (100.0%)	631 (100.0%)	396 (100.0%)	1122 (100.0%)

Table 2

Comparison Across Years of Number of Contacts in Each Type of Activity
Primary & Secondary Technical Assistance (T.A.) Topics Only
With and Without Sustained Effects

Type of Activity	1980-81 with Sustained Effects	1977-78	1980-81 without Sustained Effects
Compliance	320 (38.3%)	96 (29.8%)	208 (28.8%)
Quality Control	225 (26.9%)	132 (41.0%)	223 (30.9%)
Local Use	291 (34.8%)	94 (29.2%)	291 (40.3%)
Total	836 (100.0%)	322 (100.0%)	722 (100.0%)

technical assistance topics, the table shows that activities dealing with quality control were much more numerous in 1977-78 while compliance and local use were more numerous in 1980-81. One reason compliance is high in 1980-81 is because of the new sustained effects evaluation requirement--almost 14% of all primary and secondary topics dealt with sustained effects. Leaving sustained effects out of the 1980-81 data, results in having compliance topics with about the same relative emphasis in both years, while quality control is more emphasized in 1977-78 and local use is more emphasized in 1980-81.

One reason why quality control is so heavy in 1977-78 is that almost 30% (see Table 4) of all topics dealt with testing issues--test selection, functional level testing, test score conversion, etc. These testing topics were considered quality control because they either emphasized selecting tests with better technical characteristics or assisting clients to obtain more accurate results. Another reason for decline in quality control is that TAC direct emphasis on quality control as a separate topic has declined in favor of an orientation that says to get better quality data one first needs to assist clients to be interested in and use evaluation results. Once interest is developed clients will invest on their own in quality. The reasons for the same relative emphasis on compliance issues include the need for continued training due to staff turnover, continued yearly assistance in fulfilling reporting requirements and a certain inertia on the part of TACs.

Subtracting sustained effects, 40.3% of all technical assistance topics dealt with local use issues. This category included such things as process evaluation, time-on-task, technical investigations, JDRP, local reporting and using data for decision making. The reason for this increase is due to an evolution on both the part of TACs and clients from

emphasis on getting the TIERS in place to planning evaluation for use. Table 2 presents both primary and secondary topics. When only primary topics are considered, the pattern is the same only the relative differences are more dramatic.

Table 3 presents differences between the years in the levels of activities (awareness, skill building, or refinement) dealt with in the technical assistance contacts. Again, both primary and secondary topics are considered. Including sustained effects, 1977-78 showed more emphasis on skill building, while 1980-81 showed more emphasis on awareness and refinement. Excluding sustained effects, the years are about the same on awareness, while 1977-78 has more skill building and 1980-81 has more refinement. One reason for the emphasis on skill building in 1977-78 appears to be due to testing and to training clients in the data analyses required to fill out TIERS forms (see Table 5). These were considered skill building because they usually involved some sort of activity where clients applied knowledge obtained in the workshop--e.g., selecting tests. Awareness activities have remained proportionately the same because of the broadening scope of topics being introduced to clients and because of continued training on TIERS. The refinement level occurs, for example, when discussions with clients on a topic deal with the solving of a technical issue, altering the evaluation procedure to be more responsive to local needs, or comprehensive testing and evaluation to serve some need. The increase in refinement has been conscious on the part of TAC--assisting clients to do evaluation that responds to local need.

Table 3

Comparison Across Years of Number of Contacts at Each Level
Primary & Secondary Technical Assistance (T.A.) Topics Only
With and Without Sustained Effects

Level	1980-81 with Sustained Effects	1977-78	1980-81 without Sustained Effects
Awareness	373 (44.7%)	125 (38.8%)	286 (39.5%)
Skill Building	343 (41.1%)	169 (52.5%)	316 (43.9%)
Refinement	119 (14.2%)	28 (8.7%)	119 (16.5%)
Total	835 (100.0%)	322 (100.0%)	721 (100.0%)

Tables 4 and 5 summarize USED topics covered in technical assistance contacts. Table 4 shows the percent of topics grouped into TIERS, testing and other. Table 5 shows topics ranked by popularity. Popularity was determined both by the number of times the topic was the primary one in a contact, and by the number of clients trained on a topic. These tables show basically two things. First, the percent of TIERS and testing topics has decreased. Second, the variety of topics covered in technical assistance has increased. In fact, the relative percentage of contacts on some topics in 1977-78 was so low that I did not even bother to include ranks 7 and 8. (No other topic had more than five contacts.) This increase in the variety of topics may be one reason why awareness level activities has remained at the same level.

Discussion and Conclusions

TAC Impact

In summary, these data show that the nature and content of Region 9 TAC contacts has changed over time in the following areas:

- Increasing variety of evaluation topics in which clients are interested
- An increase in emphasis on topics dealing with local use of evaluation results
- An increase in the number of topics covered at a "refinement" level of sophistication

Because of the methodology involved in this study, these results are a conservative estimate of the changes in technical assistance over time.

Table 4

Comparison of Years on Grouped Technical Assistance Topics:
TIERS, Testing, Other Primary & Secondary Topics,
With and Without Sustained Effects

General Topic	1980-81 with Sustained Effects	1977-78	1980-81 without Sustained Effects
TIERS	203 (24.2%)	52 (16.2%)	89 (12.3%)
Testing	147 (17.6%)	95 (29.7%)	147 (20.3%)
Other	488 (58.2%)	173 (54.1%)	488 (67.4%)
Total	838 (100.0%)	320 (100.0%)	724 (100.0%)

Table 5

Most Popular Primary Technical Assistance (T.A.) Topics
Ranked by Number of Contacts and Number
of Participants

Rank Order	Topics Ranked by Number of Contacts		Topics Ranked by Number of Participants	
	1977-78	1980-81	1977-78	1980-81
1	Testing (57)	Testing (92)	Testing (438)	Sustained Effects (892)
2	Data Collection & Analysis (50)	Sustained Effects (83)	General Info on TIERS (336)	Utilizing Eval. Results (413)
3	General Info on TIERS (21)	Comprehensive Evaluation (71)	Comprehensive Evaluation (258)	General Info on TIERS (317)
4	Test Selection (15)	Evaluation Reporting (65)	Test Selection (97)	Comprehensive Evaluation (251)
5	Technical Investigations (13)	Quality Control (37)	Data Collection & Analysis (70)	Testing (240)
6	Comprehensive Evaluation (12)	Utilizing Eval. Results (35)	PACs (66)	Evaluation Reporting (200)
7		General Info on TIERS (32)	State Contracts (57)	Reviewing Eval. Findings (198)
8		Uncategorized (31)		Student Selection (149)
Other T.A.	(28)	(190)	(43)	(522)
Total T.A.	(196)	(636)	(1370)	(3182)

Although there have been changes in the content and nature of contacts, the changes seem to be the result of several forces interacting with each other—evolution in the TACs, evolution of Federal policy and evolution in the SEAs and LEAs. In the Region 9 TAC the focus of effort has evolved from an effort to implement the TIERS to a broader scope of activities. This has resulted from interactions with and needs sensing of clients which has resulted in a feel for the uses of TIERS and evaluation at the local level, what local needs are and what the context is for decision making. For clients the evolution has also appeared to go from a desire to learn what was needed in order to implement a requirement to a broader interest. This seems to have resulted from clients becoming more familiar with TAC as a resource, and being willing and desirous to expand skills based on mutual needs sensing. In short, it does not appear that increasing client skill levels are the single cause for change in Region 9 TAC services. Rather, changes have been powered in both directions—TAC interests and perceptions of client needs have become more refined at the same time that client skills have improved, their interests have broadened and they have become more familiar with TAC as a resource.

We predict that, given further funding, topics will continue to evolve and level of sophistication will continue to increase. The evolution comes from increasing sensitivity on the part of the TAC as to what is feasible and desired in local groups, from the Chapter 1 decrease in mandated evaluation requirements, and from client's true desire to improve their programs. There seems to be a great deal of interest in process evaluation in general and time-on-task in particular. We anticipate continued interest in testing--diagnostic testing and

streamlining the testing process in particular. A great deal of our contacts will continue to be "awareness" and "skill building" because the range of topics will continue to expand. The number of on-site consultations with LEAs will also probably increase--there seems to be great demand for assistance with concerns that are particular to individual districts. These will probably be accompanied by continued emphasis in regional workshops on general evaluation topics.

Feasibility of Method

The biggest difficulty in this study was reliability of the "level" and "type of activity" ratings. This was solved in this study by rating all 1977-78 contacts twice and using the "best" of the two ratings. Since second ratings tended to be higher than first, the first ratings were used in 1980-81. If a similar study were to be done this year, professional staff should code levels and types on contact logs at the same time as they code topics. This would necessitate staff training. A subsample could later be recoded by each staff member to judge reliability. 1977-78 ratings should be reviewed by staff involved in the old contact.

The procedure does not require substantial amounts of time and yields interesting comparisons.

Appendix A: USED Technical Assistance Topic Codes

Table 1

Contact Summary Sheet

Region: Month: Year:

Category Number		Number of Contacts			
		Workshop	On-site	Telephone	Letter
1.0	Providing Information				
1.1	General information on TAC/TIERS				
1.2	Model A				
1.3	Model B				
1.4	Model C				
1.5	Alternative models				
1.6	Early childhood education				
1.7	Neglected or delinquent programs				
1.8	Needs assessment				
1.9	Student selection				
1.10	JDRP				
1.11	PACs				
1.12	State contracts (151c, 183c)				
1.13	Technical investigations				
1.14	Quality assurance				
1.15	Comprehensive evaluation planning (including process evaluation)				
1.16	Reviewing evaluation findings				
1.17	Utilizing evaluation and test results				
1.18	Evaluation reporting issues				
1.19	Data collection and analysis				
1.20	Test selection				
1.21	Other testing issues (e.g., out-of-level testing, score conversions, equating)				
1.22	Other				
1.23	Sustained Effects				
2.0	Obtaining Information				
2.1	Other TACs				
2.2	USOE				
2.3	Test publishers				
2.4	Others				
3.0	Planning				
4.0	Other				

APPENDIX B
Category and Level Codes

I. Category:

1 = Compliance 2 = Quality Control 3 = Local Use 4 = Not Applicable

Use as a general rule for coding contacts--the purpose of the discussion in the contact from the point of view of the client. For example, if they were interested in test selection the reason might be to improve the quality of their data or to improve the usefulness to teachers of the scores obtained--quality control v. local use.

Anything with an ED code of 2.0-2.4, 3.0 or 4.0 gets coded as "4"--not applicable.

Examples of what to put in each category are:

Compliance--anything to be done specifically to get in the required reports or to implement the models as required/strongly suggested. For example:

- The Title I computer program
- Any discussion of computers when the main purpose is to ease the official reporting burden
- Separating selection and pretest (guideline for Model A)
- Correction formula for selecting on the pretest (when they need to use it because they didn't follow the guidelines to begin with)
- Requirements of the models
- Data analysis required for TIERS reporting
- TIERS reporting
- General technical standards
- General TAC/TIERS information
- Sustained effects evaluation requirements
- NCEs
- Presentations to parents

Quality Control--Specific quality control concerns (1.14) plus things that are done in order to improve the quality of the data. For example:

- Test selection (to get better quality data)
- Technical investigations (when the purpose is to clarify TIERS)
- Score conversions
- Computer (to get better quality data)
- OOL testing (to get better quality data)
- Anything coded as 1.14
- Selection/pretest correction formula (to improve the internal validity of the evaluation)
- Test chart
- Test administration procedures

Local Use--Things that go beyond that which is required by the TIERS.

- o Process evaluation
- o Comprehensive evaluation planning
- o Reporting for local use
- o Extra data analysis
- o Interpreting and using results
- o Computer usages for other than generating TIERS data
- o COL (to get test scores that are useful for things other than Title I evaluation)
- o Test selection (to get test scores to be used for things other than TIERS)
- o Technical investigations (to improve local use)
- o Graphing

II. Levels:

1 = Awareness 2 = Skill Building 3 = Refinement 4 = Not Applicable

Awareness

- o Presentations that are overviews of a topic
- o Sending requested information
- c Presentations of issues
- o TAC/TIERS requirements
- o Sustained effects requirements
- o Presentations that have no exercises

Skill Building

- o Workshops that have exercises
- o Consultations that solve LEA problems, shows someone how to do something, deals with actual data or evaluation design
- o Wet workshops
- o Choosing sustained effects questions and laying out plans
- o Assisting a district to plan their evaluation
- o Assisting a district to do their report

Refinement

- o All technical investigations regardless of whether they are state refinement contracts
- o Technical discussions at a high level
- o Extensions of existing systems (e.g., an alternate model)
- o Discussion of issues with knowledgeable clients with the aim of solution